

UPF International: Cultural Diversity as a Way of Peace

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May 21, 2026



On May 21, 2026, the international community observes the [World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development](#), a United Nations observance led by UNESCO. It was declared by the UN General Assembly in 2002 following UNESCO's adoption of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. The day draws attention not only to the richness of the world's cultures, but also to the role of intercultural dialogue in peace and sustainable development. It recalls a central truth: diversity becomes a resource for peace when it is joined with respect, encounter and shared responsibility.

Cultural life shapes identity, belonging, creativity and the capacity of societies to live together without reducing one another to stereotypes. This theme speaks directly to UPF's vision of peace through interdependence, mutual prosperity and universal values. Music, poetry, dance, visual art, literature, film and heritage can open spaces of trust that formal language alone often cannot create.

The founders of UPF, [Dr. Hak Ja Han](#) and [the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon](#), advanced a peace vision grounded in the conviction that humanity is One Family under God. From this perspective, cultural difference is one of the places where respect, gratitude and cooperation can be learned in practice.

This is why the [International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace](#) has particular relevance to this United Nations day. IAACP gathers leaders from performing arts, literary arts, fine arts, music, film and dance who understand that culture shapes public imagination.

Recent IAACP and UPF programs show this work in concrete form. In London, the 2025 ["Canvas of Cultures"](#) brought together artists, poets and musicians from different backgrounds around themes of heritage, resilience and unity. In Moscow, the 2025 exhibition ["Everything Begins with Love"](#) connected painting, poetry and reflection on family values. In Malaysia, a [forum on unity through arts, culture and heritage](#) marked the launch of IAACP Malaysia and brought together cultural and media partners. In 2026, the IAACP Europe and Middle East chapter was inaugurated, while IAACP in the United States convened [artists and educators](#) to discuss the healing and unifying power of art and music.

On this day, UPF invites governments, cultural institutions, educators, artists, civil society partners and its [Ambassadors for Peace](#) to deepen cooperation that protects cultural dignity while creating new spaces of dialogue. The World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development is a reminder that peace gains depth when people are able to meet through what they cherish, create and pass on. Culture does not replace diplomacy or development. It gives both a human horizon.



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ARTS AND CULTURE FOR PEACE

The International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP) is a global network of leaders in fields related to the arts and culture, including performing arts, literary arts, fine arts, music, film and dance. Artists are known for their creativity, visionary ideas and capacities to inspire others. Artists bring people together and lead our hearts and minds to reflect on the possibilities for a better world. By bringing together leaders from the arts, IAACP taps into a wellspring of talent that can be utilized in building a world of peace, drawing attention not only to the critical challenges that we face as one human family, but also the opportunities for transformation.

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Cultural Diversity as a Way of Peace



UPF Inaugurates IAACP Europe & Middle East



From Art to Ecology: Peacebuilding Initiatives in Hungary

THE CULTURAL JOURNEY THAT LED TO IAACP

From cultural ensembles to a global association for peace

The International Association of Arts and Culture for Peace (IAACP) was founded by Dr. Hak Ja Han to bring together artists, cultural leaders, and institutions across music, dance, fine arts, literature, film, and related fields in support of peacebuilding through culture. As one of UPF's primary associations, IAACP promotes artistic exchange, education, public performance, dialogue, and international cooperation across national, religious, and cultural boundaries. Its work also relates to UPF's longstanding support for the United Nations, especially where culture can strengthen human solidarity, mutual understanding, cooperation and development. It also aligns directly with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 4, SDG 16, and SDG 17. Its educational dimension also resonates with UNESCO's work on Global Citizenship Education, especially in the cultivation of intercultural understanding, responsibility, and shared civic purpose through learning.



The IAACP was initiated on November 22, 2020, during the Third Rally of Hope, but in fact it emerged from a much longer history, which began in 1962 and continues to the present. Long before IAACP was founded, Dr. Hak Ja Han and the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon had invested in children's ensembles, folk ballet companies, choirs, rock bands, brass bands, orchestras, theater groups, arts schools, artist networks, concert venues, recording spaces, and later formal associations for artists working in the cause of peace. These were not isolated projects. Over time they formed a coherent cultural tradition that IAACP is building upon.

The founders regarded art as a force able to move the human heart, elevate public taste, humanize the stranger, and make peace imaginable across entrenched divisions. Therefore, the history of IAACP is a sixty-year path of building a culture of peace through beauty, discipline, and international artistic exchange.

Introducing Korea through children's folk dance



The Little Angels, 1962

The founders' first cultural project was the Little Angels children's folk ballet, created in 1962. At that time, Korea was widely perceived abroad through the language of hardship, division, and geopolitics. The Little Angels offered a different image. Through traditional dance, music, costume, and poise, these young artists presented Korea as a civilization of refinement, history, and cultural dignity.

The founding vision was to show the world that Koreans were a people of culture, and it proved effective. The Little Angels conducted their first world tour in 1965; they performed for former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and later appeared on major American television.

In December 1973 they held a UNICEF benefit performance in the General Assembly Hall at United Nations Headquarters in New York. They also gave a Royal Command Performance for Queen Elizabeth II. In later decades they continued to serve as cultural ambassadors, including "gratitude" tours in 2010 and 2011 to nations that supported South Korea during the Korean War.

As an institutional framework, the Korean Cultural Foundation was set up to support and advance cultural activities. Additionally, in the early 1970s, Sun Hwa Arts School was founded in Seoul, offering opportunities for the education and training of young artists to the highest standards.

The Korean Folk Ballet brought the beauty of Korean dance to the United States and Japan in the 1970s. While the Little Angels offered grace and charm as a children's ensemble, the Korean Folk Ballet brought greater repertory range and professional stage development. These institutions established high standards of artistic education and performance, in the service of international understanding and cultural exchange.



The Little Angels



Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han singing together

Expanding into the musical sphere

In the early 1970s, the pursuit of peace through culture expanded to include modern music, large-scale public events, and multilingual performances aimed at broader social outreach.

The New Hope Singers International was organized in 1972 by Randolph and Linda Rimmel, both trained at the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music. The ensemble grew into a multilingual vocal group that performed in major public campaigns, celebrations, and international events. It was later led by Dr. Brian Saunders and Jeff Benson. By 1975 a global team was performing in Korea and Japan. Through the New Hope Singers, choral music became a vehicle for public connection across languages and cultures. IAACP carries that same instinct when it brings artists together, not merely to entertain, but to create an uplifting moral atmosphere.

At almost the same time, in 1973, the Rock band Sunburst was founded in Colorado by Phillip Burley. Sunburst brought contemporary popular music into the cultural mission. Under Burley, and later under Frank Grow, the band entered the world of youth culture, amplified sound, and live performance with unusual energy. In 1976, Sunburst appeared at great national gatherings for the U.S. bicentennial at Yankee Stadium in New York and Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. A second Sunburst ensemble was later formed under Jim Clark.

The Go World Brass Band was founded in April 1976, just a few weeks before a huge gathering at Yankee Stadium on June 1 in New York, where Rev. Sun Myung Moon addressed a mass audience. The ensemble began with twelve members, and quickly grew to sixty-five musicians under the direction of Kevin Pickard. The band performed at the Yankee Stadium and Washington Monument rallies as well as numerous events in the Manhattan Center. In 1978, thirty members of the band were sent to London to form a European Go World Brass Band. That same year, the European band appeared at Royal Albert Hall during a Day of Hope concert. This is another tradition that IAACP has inherited: ceremony, movement, public spectacle, and the power of music in civic space.



New Hope Singers International



Go World Brass Band 1976

Classical music, artistic excellence, and the rise of the New York City Symphony

As this cultural project advanced, it embraced the sphere of classical music through the [New York City Symphony](#). Originally founded in 1926 and professionalized in 1956, the orchestra came under the patronage of the International Cultural Foundation in 1974. Thomas Ludwig, a Juilliard student, served as the first music director under that patronage. In 1980 Dr. Brian Saunders became the orchestra's director and in 1982 Francesco Santelli took over the directorship. In 1985 David Eaton was appointed to be the ensemble's music director.



New York City Symphony at Carnegie Hall

The orchestra performed at the Yankee Stadium rally in 1976, and in 1988 undertook an international tour that included Japan and the Seoul Olympic Arts Festival. Over time it appeared at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Apollo Theater, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the United Nations, Merkin Hall, and the Manhattan Center.

Under David Eaton's leadership the orchestra enhanced its public profile and artistic reach, as he arranged New York City Symphony performances in diplomatic, interreligious, and peace-related settings. Over the decades he has led performances at the United Nations, collaborated with international soloists, conducted peace concerts in multiple countries, and helped shape later IAACP-related cultural activities.

The New York City Symphony established an important precedent for IAACP, demonstrating that peace-oriented arts did not have to remain marginal or amateur. The orchestra upheld professional standards, performed at major venues, and received critical recognition. After the orchestra's Carnegie Hall debut in 1989, the New York Daily News urged readers to "give credit where it is due." The newspaper credited Rev. Sun Myung Moon's International Cultural Foundation with helping the New York City Symphony become "one of America's finest orchestras." IAACP's weight today rests in part on the cultural credibility built by institutions such as this orchestra.

The importance of the Manhattan Center

The [Manhattan Center](#) was acquired in 1976, and gradually developed into a cultural base with performance halls, recording facilities, television capability, and event infrastructure. Cultural movements need spaces where artists can rehearse, record, perform, and experiment. The Manhattan Center supplied exactly that.



Manhattan Center

Built in 1906 as the Manhattan Opera House by Oscar Hammerstein I, the Manhattan Center carried a long New York cultural history. Since the 1950s, its Grand Ballroom had been used for classical recording and film scoring, including sessions with the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera. After 1976, the facility was renovated and expanded with additional recording and television studios, giving the wider arts movement a strong production base.

In the late 1980s the founders' son, Hyo Jin Moon, an accomplished musician and producer, became artistic director of the facility. He was a prolific musician whose body of works ran into the thousands. He wrote, composed, arranged, and performed a wide range of music as a vocalist and guitarist. His vision helped shape the creative direction of the Manhattan Center and raised its professional capacity in recording, multimedia production, and live events.

The Manhattan Center became a home for concerts, celebrations, broadcasts, and later UPF-related cultural programs. It also held a recognized place in New York's wider cultural life. The Hammerstein Ballroom hosted Bryan Adams's 1997 MTV Unplugged recording, and Patti LaBelle's 1998 Live! One Night Only was recorded there with guest appearances by Mariah Carey and Luther Vandross. The venue stood at the intersection of the movement's artistic development and New York's professional performance culture.



Hyo Jin Moon with his team at Manhattan Center, 1989



Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han at the Manhattan Center, 1989

From one national tradition to many cultures on one stage

By the late 1970s, the founders' cultural vision had expanded well beyond the original concept of presenting Korean folk arts, to embrace multi-genre and multicultural forms. An early example was the International Folk Ballet, founded in New York in 1978 under the initial direction of Georgia Sherman Lewis. Its repertoire drew from many folk traditions and its performers were from many nations, allowing cultural diversity itself to become the message.

The New World Players, founded by Linda Eisenberg, broadened the range of this cultural ecosystem beyond music and dance into staged drama and musical theater. Drawing on her love of Broadway, Eisenberg worked to create a troupe that brought narrative, characterization, and stagecraft into the wider peace-oriented arts world. Productions such as *The Wiz*, *Man of La Mancha*, and *Godspell* expanded the emotional vocabulary of the project.

Youth touring ensembles and the energy of movement

In 1979, the youth movement inspired by the founders generated a more mobile and outward-facing performance culture, turning its artistic ensembles into a touring network.

Performers from Sunburst, the International Folk Ballet, and the Go World Brass Band were joined by newly formed ensembles

performers from bands, the International Folk Ballet, and the Go World Brass Band were joined by newly formed ensembles including Blue Tuna Band, Prime Force, The Front Group, and later New Vision. These teams traveled extensively, especially on college campuses and in youth settings. Blue Tuna later carried this touring model into Europe, including performances in Berlin in 1988. In the same wider performance environment, additional groups such as the ITPN Band appeared as the network continued to diversify.

This phase introduced flexibility, collaboration across genres, and mobility across regions – all characteristics that persist in IAACP. Collaboration and shared purpose meant that the arts need not be limited to permanent companies or fixed institutions. They could be assembled into teams, sent across borders, adapted for different audiences, and enabled to create direct contact with young people. That logic remains visible in IAACP's regional webinars, launches, cultural forums, and cross-border artistic partnerships.



Sunburst performers

Ballet and the pursuit of excellence

Founded in 1984, the Universal Ballet added another dimension to the founders' cultural sphere. Under the leadership of Julia Moon as general director, it became a professional, internationally recognized ballet company. Its repertoire included both classical works and original productions such as *Shim Chung*, whose 1988 Olympic-era presentation helped give Korean ballet a wider international profile.

A major player in the ballet company's development was Oleg Vinogradov, the distinguished Russian choreographer who had served as artistic director of the Kirov Ballet, later known as the Mariinsky Ballet. Vinogradov brought the acclaimed Russian classical tradition to the company's artistic development, and later became its artistic director emeritus. Reviews from New York, Madrid, Rome, and elsewhere recognized the company's artistic merit. Universal Ballet embodied the idea that peace-oriented art deserved seriousness, technique, discipline, and mastery.



*Universal Ballet Company 1984
Mrs. Julia Moon*

The same logic applied to the Kirov Academy of Ballet in Washington, D.C., founded in 1990. The academy was the first dance school outside Russia officially allowed to carry the name "Kirov." Its opening brought letters of congratulations from President George H. W. Bush and the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. It became a major ballet training institution, and helped launch the careers of dancers such as Michele Wiles, Hee Seo, Evan McKie, Matthew Golding, Brooklyn Mack, and others. Official academy materials document a wide alumni network, with graduates in major companies around the world. In this sense, the academy did not merely preserve a tradition; it generated one.

From performance companies to formal artist associations

At the end of the 1980s, people involved in these various cultural projects began forming formal associations and connecting with other artists. The first such group, Artists Association International, was active from 1989 to 1991. It sought to connect artists with a positive cultural message, across disciplines and national boundaries.

Its successor, the Artists Association for World Peace (AAWP), active from 1995 to 2017, included concerts and recitals in São Paulo, New York, Pyongyang, Paraguay, Hanoi, Vienna, and at the United Nations. Through figures such as Seiko Lee, David Eaton, and collaborators in many countries, the arts were increasingly framed not only as performance, but as a direct language of reconciliation, diplomacy, and public peace culture. Of particular note in this context were the concert in Hanoi in 2013 in association with the Israeli consulate, and the New York City Symphony's 2015 United Nations 70th anniversary concert.

Also of note was the Middle East Peace Initiative musical work, especially the *Halelu Cantata* for Peace produced in 2005 through the collaborations of David Eaton, Seiko Lee, and vocalist David D'Or. These projects demonstrate that music can bridge differences in regions marked by political and religious tension, with culture serving as a language of dignity and encounter.



Artists Association for World Peace UN 70th Anniversary



New York City Symphony U.N. Concert 2015

Widening the scope through Hyo Jeong institutions

In recent decades, the establishment of the Hyo Jeong Peace Center and Cultural Foundation, the Hyo Jeong Cultural Foundation, its Arts Academy, and its Recording Studio, have created a comprehensive cultural infrastructure in Korea. These facilities enable sustained production, training, recording, and intergenerational development.

Projects involving young people are a key aspect of this endeavor, including the Hyo Jeong Youth Orchestra, inaugurated in 2018, along with children's song projects and the Amazing Grace Second Generation Choir in Korea. These initiatives ensure that the tradition of pursuing peace through the arts will continue to develop through younger generations, new institutional platforms, and wider international participation.

The formal appearance of IAACP

When the founding of IAACP was announced in November 2020 during the Third Rally of Hope, it represented the culmination of a cultural journey, not a beginning from zero. Its formal description as a global network of leaders in performing arts, literary arts, fine arts, music, film, and dance gave organizational form to patterns that had been developing for decades.

Thus, IAACP brings together the diplomacy of beauty represented by the Little Angels, the pedagogical rigor of Sun Hwa Arts School and Universal Ballet, the multi-genre reach of New Hope Singers International and the Go World Brass Band, the multicultural vision of the International Folk Ballet, and the direct peacebuilding mission of Artists Association for World Peace. This accumulated history gives IAACP depth and force.

That continuity remains visible today. On January 23, 2026, members of the New York City Symphony, under the direction of David Eaton, presented a musical performance in the ECOSOC Chamber at United Nations Headquarters in support of the 80th anniversary of the Economic and Social Council. The music preceded the official opening and the high-level discussion titled "ECOSOC at 80: Renewing Multilateralism and Global Solidarity for a Sustainable Future." The moment was contemporary, but the pattern represented a tradition: the arts serving international cooperation, especially in a UN setting.

The mission of IAACP going forward

IAACP should therefore be understood not merely as a decorative element of the peace movement, but as the institutional continuation of a long effort to engage the arts in peacebuilding. Across six decades, that effort took many forms: children performing Korean dances before world leaders; choirs singing in many languages; rock bands reaching youth audiences; brass bands turning ceremony into spectacle; orchestras playing in major halls and diplomatic venues; theater companies engaging human emotions; ballet institutions raising artistic standards; and artist associations linking creative work directly to peacebuilding.

Through their lifelong work in cultural development, UPF's founders have shown that the arts can be a force for good, bringing harmony where there is discord, unity where there is division, and peace where there is conflict. The arts have the power to uplift the human spirit and remind us of our common origin and shared purpose as One Family under God.

Today, IAACP looks forward to ongoing expansion in cooperation with artists, cultural institutions, and international partners who see in the arts a practical instrument of peace.

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